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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000628

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NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J. FRAZER  
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY  
PARIS FOR C. NEARY  
NAIROBI FOR T. PFLAUMER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/01/2013

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#)

SUBJECT: MDC ELEMENTS STILL CONTEMPLATING VIOLENCE

REF: HARARE 516

Classified By: Political Officer Audu Besmer for reasons 1.5 b/d

Summary:

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1. (C) On March 26, MDC Secretary-General Welshman Ncube assured the Ambassador that the party remains committed to peaceful change, while acknowledging that some party elements had been planning bombing attacks prior to the March 18-19 stayaway. Solomon Chikowero, the MDC Head of Intelligence said, however, that some in the party rank and file were still prepared to launch violent action against the Government, and were awaiting the green light from MDC leadership to proceed. End Summary.

Ambassador with MDC Secretary-General

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2. (C) The Ambassador, accompanied by Polchief, met on March 26 with MDC Secretary-General Welshman Ncube to counsel strongly against the MDC's initiation of violence. The Ambassador emphasized that in addition to losing the high moral ground in such a scenario, the MDC would be playing on ZANU-PF's proven turf and could not win a violent battle with the ruling party. Ncube stressed that the MDC leadership remains committed to peaceful change, saying that conducting a war against ZANU-PF with petrol bombs would be suicidal. He acknowledged that elements of his party had been planning certain "insane things" prior to the stayaway, such as bombing bridges and electrical installations. When this was brought to his attention, he immediately spoke with deputy Secretary-General Gift Chimanihire, who supervises the

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party's intelligence and security directorates, and told him to rescind any orders that might have been given for violent action.

3. (C) Ncube said the party would not be ready to launch the next phase of mass action when a March 31 ultimatum deadline expires. (Note: After the successful March 18-19 stayaway, the MDC issued a list of demands the Government must meet by March 31 or face further civil unrest. End Note.) The party is now coordinating with civic organizations such as the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and the National Constitutional Assembly, and would likely need until the second or third week in April to do the necessary mobilization. Asked what form the next phase of mass action would take, Ncube said the party wanted to organize protests that were sustainable and ongoing, not one- or two-day affairs. Prolonged stayaways and street demonstrations in the high-density suburbs were the most likely actions. In the beginning, however, the MDC would not organize large-scale demonstrations in the city center, in order to minimize the possibility of security service attacks on members of the public and to avoid gathering large numbers of party activists in the same place.

Violence - A Contingency Plan?

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4. (C) In a separate conversation with Poloff on March 26, Solomon Chikowero, the MDC Head of Intelligence, said plans for violent activities are in place and that they are simply waiting for the green light from the MDC leadership, which is to meet on March 28 to decide what to do when the MDC ultimatum expires on March 31. Chikowero said there was a feeling within the MDC that whether they engaged in stayaways, demonstrations, or more violent activities--the response from the GOZ was the same: detentions, arrests, beatings, tortures and rapes. He expressed the sense of some within the MDC that they had exhausted their options and were left with only violent means to pressure the GOZ into a dialogue on political change.

5. (C) Chikowero suggested that parastatal Zimbabwe Unified Passenger Company (ZUPCO) buses would be prime targets for attack, and that avoiding injuries would be important. Chikowero did not mention other specific targets, but his

subordinates had elaborated on this topic in previous conversations with us (reftel).

16. (C) Poloff reiterated that if the MDC engaged in violence that the U.S. and others in the international community would have no choice but to distance themselves. Organized violence was not the hallmark of a legitimate democratic political party. Poloff suggested there were many other peaceful ways to motivate political change. Poloff suggested that the recent stayaway had already bolstered Zimbabweans' confidence in their ability to influence political change. Violent activities would only invite a more violent crackdown on the part of government, as we saw in the aftermath of the March 18-19 stayaway.

17. (C) Chikowero agreed in principle that non-violent activities were a good idea, and that violent activities could backfire politically, but he said that the final decision would be made above his head. He also said non-violent stayaways and protests, though more desirable, were more complicated to organize in a reasonable amount of time, and according to him, less likely to succeed. Chikowero said discouraging stone throwing was a lost cause with MDC supporters on the street who have been beaten repeatedly by security forces.

Soldiers?

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18. (C) Chikowero said the "soldiers" currently carrying out the retribution campaign against MDC supporters are National Youth Service members, "green bombers" led by war vets who re-entered the military in 2001. He claimed that none of them are regular soldiers. Chikowero said that his office could compile a list of the war-vets cum soldiers, and other information on which military units have supplied the camouflage uniforms, military vehicles and weapons. Chikowero was speculating, but he suggested that it was likely the Joint Operations Command (JOC), which comprises elements of the police, military, and Central Intelligence Organization, was coordinating, or was at least complicit in the operation.

Comment:

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19. (C) We believe that Welshman Ncube is committed to achieving political change peacefully and hope that other senior MDC leaders share this view. His obvious discomfort in discussing this topic, however, raises some question about the commitment of other MDC leaders to the path of non-violence. It is noteworthy, that the MDC has issued no public statement condemning the sporadic violence that occurred during the March 18-19 stayaway. Such a statement would send a clear message to the increasingly frustrated rank and file that the party was opposed to violence of any sort. Instead it appears that attacks on ZANU-PF interests are being kept in reserve as a contingency plan, and cultivated by lower-level officials and supporters who themselves see few other viable options. So far, those elements have heeded the leadership's stand down orders, but it is impossible to predict how long their commitment to the party leadership will outweigh their frustration with the regime. We will continue to stress in our interactions with MDC leaders our conviction that violence is not the way forward.

Who is Chikowero?

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10. (C) Chikowero is an impressive figure, a former Air Force paratrooper and intelligence officer who served in Somalia, Mozambique and various posts within Zimbabwe. A military court imprisoned him in 1991 for refusing to follow orders during operations in Mozambique, which he described as using junior soldiers as cannon fodder. He was released in 1996 and declined an offer to re-join the Air Force to instead team up with the fledgling MDC a couple of years later. Since joining the MDC he has been arrested about eleven times, and tortured twice within the past year. He said the tortures have only hardened his resolve against the current regime. He is widely regarded in ZANU-PF circles as being at the center of plans for MDC-sponsored violence, and is watched closely by the security services. End Comment.  
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